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ABSTRACT

The advent of schooling, the cash economy, and new political systems have brought about many situations providing challenges to the Samburu and the Turkana nomadic pastoralists in northern Kenya. This report details the experiences of the staff of the El-barta project in working with communities within a situation of isolation, harsh climatic conditions, and few economic resources. Chapter 1 of the paper introduces the organization and describes the scope of their work in enabling groups and individuals to take responsibility for building the capacity of their communities in order to enhance young children's development. El-barta works closely with community organizations through its six departments--health, education, food security, communications, finance, and administration--and links its interventions to the communities through three main community groups: focus groups, function committees, and opinion leaders. Chapters 2 through 5 examine different aspects of the El-barta project, showing how they are tied together in an integrated program: (1) early childhood development program, building on positive traditional child-rearing practices and facilitating the development of community day care centers; (2) health interventions, including medical care, maternal-child health, nutrition, personal hygiene, and safe home environment; (3) food security interventions, including drought preparedness, improved food practices, and income generating activities; and (4) further education interventions, including out-of-school programming and adult literacy training. Chapter 6 details some of the obstacles to program implementation and identifies potential goals for further enhancing early childhood development. The report concludes by asserting that it is critical to have an integrated program when working in a harsh environment and

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imperative to keep as many good traditional practices as possible for a society in transition from traditional to modern ways of life. (KB)

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Early Childhood Development

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The El-barta child and family project

By Andrew Kopoi Lanyasunya and Moses S. Lesolaya
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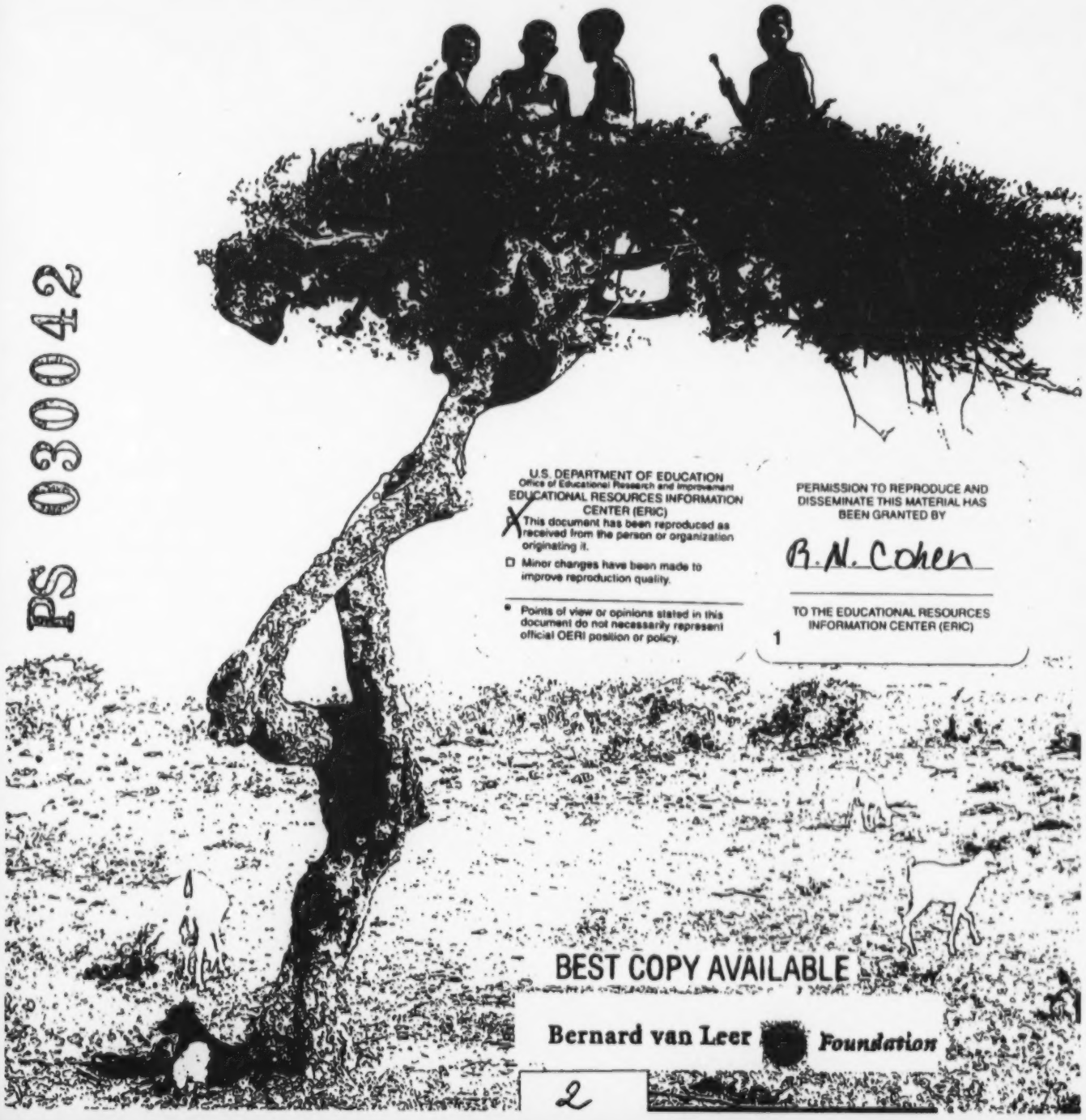

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About the authors

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Early Childhood Development

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Community based early child care and development programme: an integrated approach

By Andrew Ropilo Lanyasunya and
Moses S. Lesolayia.
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November 2001

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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Chapter one

Working in the arid lands of Northern Kenya

The ever increasing wave of socio-economic change and globalisation is sweeping the whole world. Even the Samburu and the Turkana nomadic pastoralists in a remote part of Northern Kenya have not been spared. These communities and their herds span a considerable area of Kenya's northern arid and semi-arid lands. For centuries they have crossed their dry country as dictated by their lifestyles. Their oral traditions, handed down through the generations, tell of how they had enjoyed every bit of their past, and that this pleasure in their heritage remains as strong as ever today. Their rich culture, values, norms, beliefs and so on, still provide these pastoralists with a safety net to cope with life's changes and hardships. For example, their oral traditions have always had a positive impact on the development of their children. The environment has always supported oral traditions, and they continue to this day.

However, the world has never changed with such rapidity as over the last hundred years, and the current changes have brought about many new situations. The advent of schooling, the cash economy, new political systems and so on has all exerted an influence even in this remote area. Environmental degradation, food insecurity, unsafe drinking water, and poor health and nutrition are just some of the problems that the Samburu and Turkana communities have been facing. They face the dilemma of trying to catch up with rest of the world while holding on to their culture.

The area that we, the El-barta Child and Family Programme – henceforth El-barta – work in is an administrative sub-district of Samburu District whose main town is Baragoi. This part of Northern Kenya is exceptionally arid, with plains, isolated hills and scrub vegetation. Rainfall is erratic and varies with seasons – less than 700 millimetres of rain falls each year. Short rains occur around October and November and sometimes extend to December; while long rains come in March to May. The soils are thin and stony and support very little vegetation. The non-arable land is only usable for grazing livestock, and the rainfall is generally inadequate to support both the livestock and the communities. The only reliable water source, the Ewaso River, is about 155 kilometres away. The two nearest rivers are both more than 40 kilometres away, and they are both seasonal.

Of the area's total population of approximately 44,200, 61 percent is below 19 years of age, and most of these are children of school going age. About 5 percent of the people are aged 55 years and above. This implies that of the total population, over 66 percent can be considered dependants and the potential labour force is therefore less than 34 percent. That said, in fact

most of the people between the ages of five and 59 years are actively involved in looking after livestock. These factors present a tremendous challenge to the work of the El-barta project.

Why this paper?

We have written this paper to share some of our experiences with others and to invite an exchange. We run an integrated programme that looks at our communities' needs, and works together with them on finding solutions. Together with the communities, who are represented by elected Focus Groups, we run programmes as diverse as animal husbandry and crop growing to peace initiatives and education. One aspect that all these programmes have in common is that they directly or indirectly, have an impact on our young children. This is what we hope to address in this paper.

We will start off by sharing some of the general issues that we have faced. We then introduce our organisation and the scope of our work. The rest of the paper is split into chapters, each one looking at a different part of our overall programme, but all of which have young children at heart. We end the paper by looking at the challenges we face and the way forward as we perceive it.

Underlying issues

In the course of implementing our programme, we have come up against a number of issues that are vital to take into consideration. Those that have been instrumental in propelling action in our activities are highlighted here.

1. Though the community has a rich knowledge of traditional foods and fruits that help the nutritional status, these foods and fruits are no longer readily available due to the increased human population and the subsequent depletion of indigenous forests.

2. Poverty is a major hindrance to community mobilisation. For a poor family to be able to be actively engaged in development activities there has to be some food provision.

3. The Samburu and Turkana communities have a wealth of early childhood development practices. These are traditional practices and, while to some may look 'primitive', they fit well into the modern situation in terms of child stimulation and play materials, songs, lullabies, poems and so on. And of course, and most importantly, they fit into the lifestyle of the communities.

4. 'Insecurity'[1] is a major factor, periodically hindering the project's work.

Introduction to the organisation

The El-barta Child and Family Programme, affiliated to the Christian Children's Fund Inc. Kenya, was originally established in Baragoi in 1974 to address the needs of families displaced by large scale cattle rustling during the early 1970s.

1 Over the last few years, Baragoi has been affected by 'insecurity'. The term 'insecurity' refers to a state of constant fear and despondency among the region's peoples as a result of widespread cattle rustling and tribal conflicts. Poverty and drought have caused the severe depletion of herds and have led to rampant cattle rustling. The rustling and conflicts in turn have displaced families from their original home areas where they lived in dispersed groupings, and has pushed families into settling together for safety in large villages of over 300 households. This has caused overcrowding and overstretching of grazing land and facilities such as pit latrines. The consequences are outbreaks of skin diseases, jiggers, a lack of privacy and a lack of playing areas for children.

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It did this through relief work and running a children's hostel. By the mid 1980s it had evolved into a community based organisation whose main focus was to enable groups and individuals to take responsibility for building the capacity of the community. This approach was adopted to better meet the increasing needs of the community by broadening its scope from focusing solely on the child to looking at family development and, by extension, at the development of the community as a whole.

This approach is still guided by our vision of a community that is able to enhance its own well-being and quality of life, and those of its children. El-barta's purpose is to build the capacity of the community to mobilise resources to address their own needs. We try to do this by:

- strengthening existing community structures;
- sensitising the communities to realise, appreciate and practically exploit their potential and resources with dignity;
- enhancing the communities' ability to mobilise external resources to supplement funds identified by El-barta;
- stimulating community participation;
- strengthening collaboration and networking;
- empowering the communities with necessary skills, knowledge and information through training and exposure visits.

El-barta is committed to working towards achieving sustainability through strengthening local structures and institutions; capacity building; encouraging team work; quality production; an integrated approach; neutrality; accountability and transparency; collaboration and networking; gender sensitivity; and, environmental awareness. It also seeks to establish documentation and publicity skills and resources. El-barta's current intervention activities fall under three main programmatic areas: health; food security; and education. These will be addressed in more detail later in this paper.

Operational structure

El-barta works closely with community organisations through its six departments, namely: health; education; food security; communications; finance; and administration. It links its interventions to the communities through three main community organs, namely: focus groups; function committees; and opinion leaders.

The target families cluster themselves into groups of about 15 households. These 15 households form a 'focus group'. Each focus group selects a representative in charge of specific objectives in the areas of health, education, food security and communications. All the representatives are trained to train other members of their groups, in order to empower them.

The diagram on the next page, shows El-barta's operational structure.

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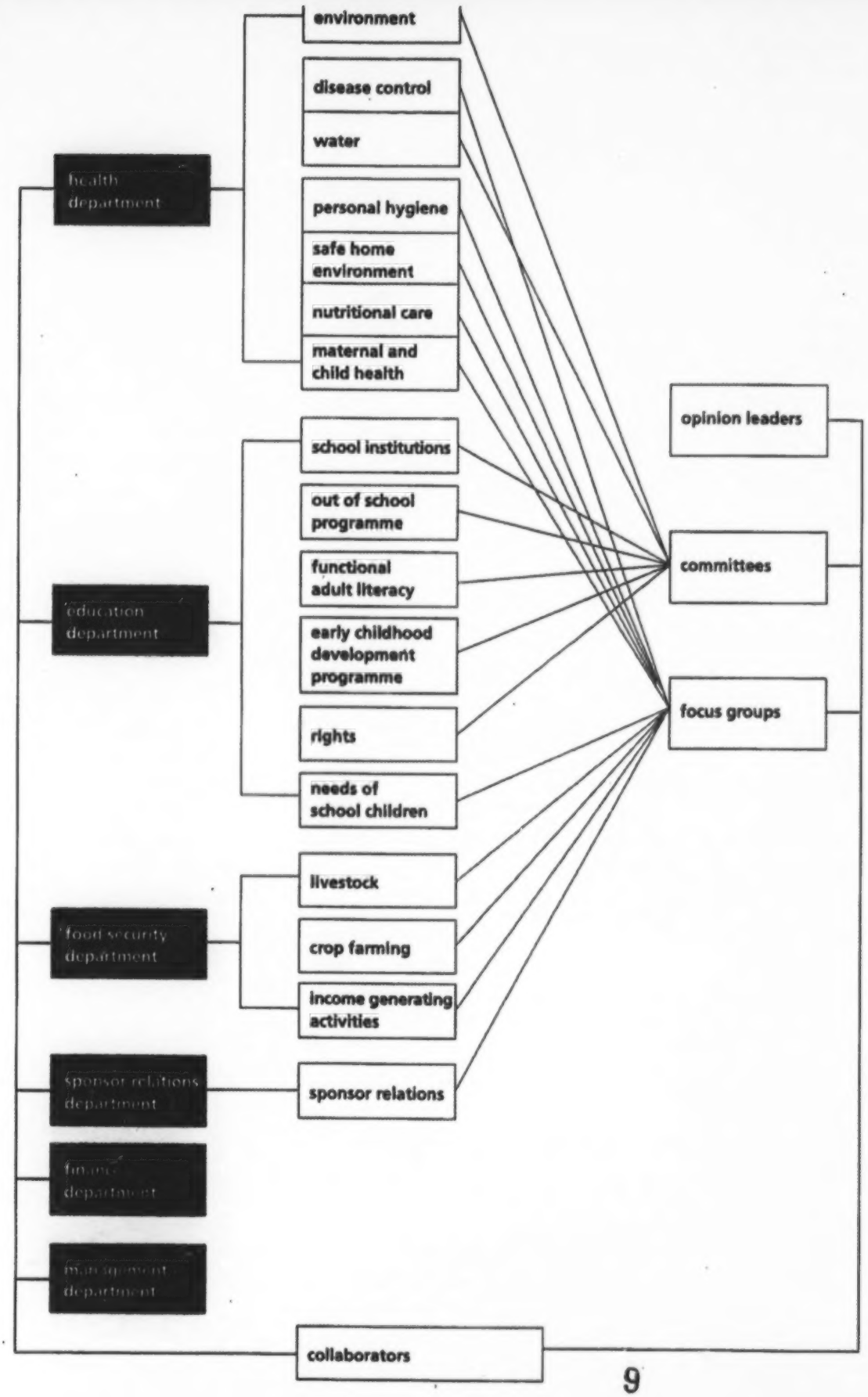
1 continued The insecurity has also hindered the implementation of Project activities, especially as families regularly move from one place to another in search of security. In times of insecurity, families do not make use of activities such as the *Lmwate* – a loose translation for 'an enclosure' where the daycare centre activities are held – as raids can occur any time during the day, and parents fear leaving their children there.

El-barta began to fund and facilitate peace discussions between the warring communities since when there has been a reduction of attacks and counter attacks. Workshops are organised on peace issues with local leaders (civic, administration and religious) and village elders; and the project preaches peace in every forum, such as public meetings, religious gatherings and leaders' meetings.


environment
disease control
water
health department
personal hygiene
safe home environment
nutritional care
maternal and child health
opinion leaders
school institutions
out of school programme
committees
functional adult literacy
education department
early childhood development programme
focus groups
rights
needs of school children
livestock
food security department
crop farming
income generating activities
sponsor relations department
sponsor relations
collaborators

Chapter two

The early childhood development programme

A specific early childhood component is new to El-barta. A few years ago, we recognised that early childhood development is an important component in any development undertaking. So, in 1998 after many years of working through community programmes that reached young children indirectly, El-barta added a specific early childhood component to its work. Our point of departure was that adults are a product of what took place in their early years. Therefore, development should start at the roots; and the root of humanity is the children. Children are the leaders of days to come and therefore the healthier the children of today are, the healthier the future. Research shows that a child's early years are crucial for physical, social, emotional and mental development. By the age of three about 85 percent of the child's brain is developed, and we believe that by the age of six the child is almost resistant to change.

Given these beliefs, El-barta wanted to implement an approach for early childhood development that would have a direct impact on the children; would be broader in focus; effective in quality; comprehensive; cost effective; and holistic. We envisaged an approach that would reach the children in their own cultural context and in which the community would fully participate. Since children do not exist on their own, any programme that targets children should also target their parents so that the parents can pass the fruits of the programmes to the children. Parents are the main and the first educators and caregivers of their children; so if we address the situation of the parents, the children benefit as a trickle down effect. As a result, all our programmes are integrated to form a whole system of interrelated activities all targeting the children's well-being as an end product.

To this end, the ECD Programme is now an integral part of El-barta's interventions in health, food security and education, as it goes beyond the child and includes a holistic and preventive approach. It considers the child before and after birth; and works with the parents on childcare practices, early stimulation and preventive measures. Chapters Three onwards looks at these interventions.

Starting the early childhood development work

In El-barta, we believed that there were many positive traditional childrearing practices in the Samburu and Turkana cultures upon which we could build an ECD programme – but we were concerned that some of these were being lost. The first thing we did was to try to gather information on these traditional early childhood learning practices, in order to find which are supportive to child development and which impair child development. We visited remote villages to see what we thought might be undiluted practices; we held workshops with parents, preschool teachers and opinion leaders; and we carried out baseline surveys.

What we found during our visits to the villages revealed that although traditional child rearing practices such as those around food or the division of care of the children are still practised to some extent, the same problems that affect villages near urban centres also affect the remote villages. And they all had to do with poverty.

Poverty is widespread and is breaking down some of the traditional practices. Poverty puts a lot of pressure on parents and children, to the extent that the adults do not have the energy for interacting with their children or for story telling in the evenings; and the children, often lethargic from hunger, are too tired to go out and play. On top of this, scarcity often means

Photo above and right: Parents and older siblings gather at one of the *Lmwate* to collect their young children and brothers and sisters. *Photo by Joanna Bouma.*

that the special traditional foods high in nutritional value are no longer available to give to the children. Rarely do the families have the money with which to supplement the children's diets. However, we did find some positive aspects. One of these is that grandmothers still care for children during the day under the shade of large trees. We built our early childhood development approach around these *Loipi* ('in the shade') or *Lmwate* ('enclosure') activities.

Breaking down of traditional care

Traditionally, Turkana and Samburu society had a well organised system of care for young children. Living off the environment through which the communities travelled meant that older children and adults were away grazing their livestock and gathering foodstuff and water. The young children were often left in the care of grandparents or older members of the communities in the *loipi*. In return, the grandparents were cared for by the communities and were given food and firewood, and help in building houses.

This system worked well until recent times. There are now several problems impairing the efficiency of this traditional method of care for the welfare of the young children. The global culture mentioned in the introduction means that people want change. People are grasping modernity, coming under the influence of trading centres, schools and churches. And these are leading to a change in lifestyle and the breakdown of the extended family system. The

roles of grandmothers are changing, as are the cultural values, norms, beliefs and other factors supportive to ECD. These changes have had a huge impact on children. Parents are losing touch with old childrearing practices; there are few or no visible social activities for children in and around the villages; promiscuity among the youth is on the increase; the number of street children is rising; the traditional roles of the elders are being neglected; and malnutrition, especially among the under fives, is common. This situation is made worse by the previously mentioned rampant poverty due to cattle rustling and persistent droughts that have almost wiped out the livestock. The resulting

Early Childhood

For the Samburu people, early childhood is a time for growth, and its growth is watched by the community as a whole. Anyone in the community is responsible for the child's well-being, and children are considered to belong to everyone. Children signify wealth, continuity and prestige. Early childhood is traditionally seen as a stage of life when children slowly learn oral traditions, way of life, and customs. This is the stage when oral traditions are told to the new generation, describing every bit of the past.

Early childhood is seen as a time of freedom and a time when the self-confidence of adulthood is built. The Samburu believe that during the early years the brain develops and the children are therefore responsive to environmental influences. From birth to about six years, the children have little to do except play, listen, imitate, learn and build their language skills. While the children's care is largely the responsibility of the mother, their growth and development is closely watched by everyone and commences at conception. Love, care and discipline is given by anyone in the community who meets the child.

Early Childhood Development amongst the Samburu people: building on their cultural strength, by Judith W. Shikanda, CCF, Kenya

displacements and the disruptions to the socio-cultural lifestyles that used to provide proper care for children, including the provision of nutritious foods and opportunities for socialisation are further exacerbating the situation.

The hard economic situation which has forced both parents to look for food far from homes means that parents have to leave home very early in the morning and come back in the evening, often leaving young children on their own without care. Conventional preschools cannot provide quality care to the young children, and those left at home in the care of inexperienced elder siblings are often inadequately cared for.

Community based Lmwate

Seeing these problems worsening over time, at a certain point we realised that reaching the children indirectly through our food security, health and other programmes was not enough. We felt that we had to develop an intervention that reached the young children more directly. We thus started the traditional community based *Lmwate*.

Loosely translated, *Lmwate* means 'in the enclosure', and the community uses it to mean a circular fenced off area in the shade of large trees that serves as a daycare facility for children. The name given to these daycare facilities differs across the areas. Some Samburu areas call it *Loipi*, while others refer to it as *Lmwate*. Under this intervention El-barta runs six *Lmwate* in the community. These centres are all community initiatives, and are located in each of the settlements. They are also managed by a committee at which all focus groups are represented. The circular shape of the *Lmwate* is

similar to that of the *manyattas* (homesteads). The *Lmwate* are filled with home made toys and play equipment, and children's play materials take the place of the houses and livestock pens found in the *manyatta*. The *Lmwate* are lively places, very much at the centre of the community, with parents walking in and out, and older children coming to visit.

The parents are very much the driving force behind the *Lmwate*. If they decide that they want one, they find and clear the land, they elect a committee from among themselves to manage the *Lmwate*, they make the play equipment and they work with the children. In the *Lmwate* parents themselves carry out early stimulation activities. They make play materials and toys for children using locally available material. They make animals and figurines of people made of clay and wood, wooden climbing frames and hoops. They play with the children, making sure that through play the youngsters build strength and muscle, and use their fine motor skills in playing with the small toys. The parents sing songs, tell stories, recite poems, and play with the children to stimulate their mental capacities. Children learn best through observation, and manipulation and feeling of materials. It is clear that the community participates in many ways. Its members are responsible for identifying the sites, constructing the *Lmwate*, providing the land on which the *Lmwates* are created and supplying water and firewood – a big task in itself. More importantly, however, they initiate the *Lmwate*. They form committees that oversee the day to day operations of the centres, and they liaise with El-barta to realise their anticipated needs.

The role of El-barta in this whole process is that of a facilitator. Parents initially did not have the expertise to organise themselves on a wides scale, so we helped to bring people together and to build organisational capacity. Parents also applied to us for financial resources for buying basic materials and food supplements. In short, parents take full responsibility.

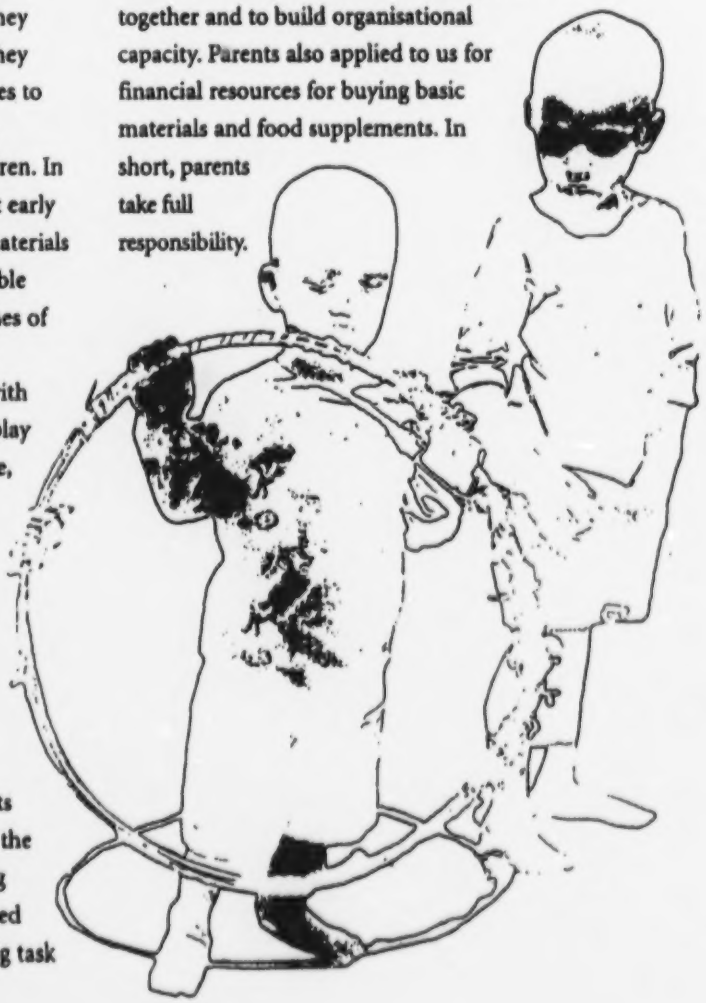


Photo: Children play with home made toys in the *Lmwate*. *Photo by Joanna Bouma.*

All they approach us for is some initial small funding; some help in learning how to organise themselves and run a programme; some knowledge on nutrition for young children; and some basic training in working with young children.

The impact on the children has been tremendous. Parents say that their children are now more open and they insist that they go to the *Lmwates* and later on to school. They socialise more freely with other children, are more active at home, and are unafraid to talk to people.

Over the few years that the *Lmwate* have been in operation there has been an increase in children playing during their free time, and play materials and structures can now be found in many villages. This demonstrates the importance and understanding that adults are placing on early childhood stimulation. Two of the communities, Parkishon and Bendera, have reported that older children have started to gather at the *Lmwate* in the evening. Unfortunately, they have destroyed the climbing and play structures which were not made to carry the weight of the older children. Nevertheless, this is an indication both that children have adopted early stimulation and that the *Lmwate* have a central place in the communities.

The *Lmwate* have had a significant impact on the health of children. They act as the community resource centres where – apart from being the place where parental training sessions are held, and early stimulation materials are developed – activities such as supplementary feeding, deworming and growth monitoring are carried out. One result has been that many

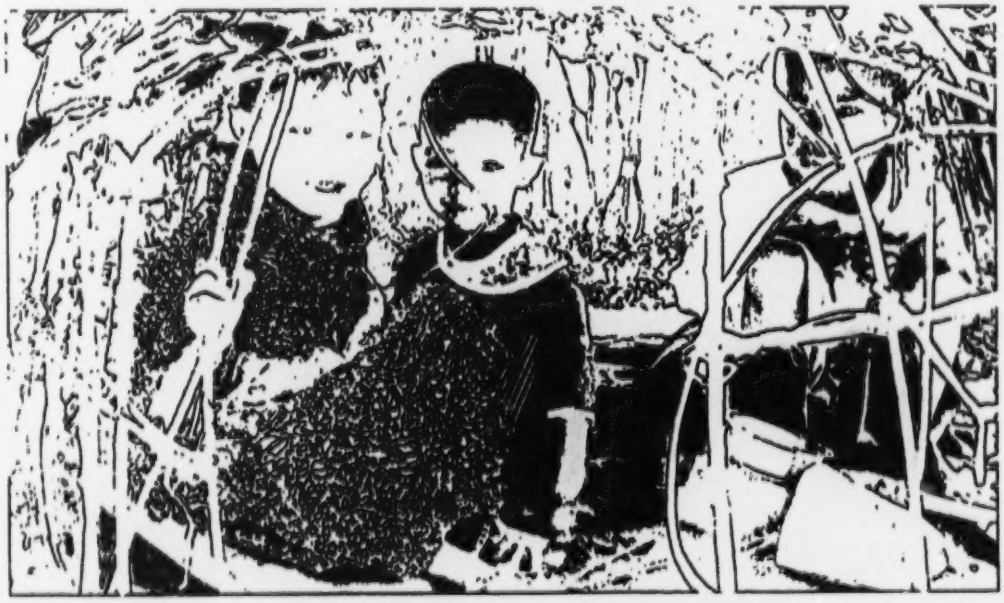


Photo: Children playing 'house' in one of the *Lmwates*. *Photo by Tanja van de Linde.*

The role of the grandmothers

Grandmothers play a big role in traditional childrearing. In many cases, children are left with their grandmothers while the mothers are away busy with their domestic chores.

The task of passing on the oral traditions to the children belongs to the grandmothers. They do this through story telling, songs, lullabies and other activities. Traditionally, these took place in the *Loipi*, common playing grounds specially created for the grandmothers and children, as the grandmothers watch over the children. These were usually enclosures located near the *manyattas* (homesteads) and under a tree. Usually two or more grandmothers were selected in the village to look after the children. The Loipi gave children the chance to socialise and to take part in traditional activities such as play, song, dance. They were also given the chance to develop character and to identify with others.

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families from areas not covered by the Project migrate into the Project areas in order to get access to the services offered in the *Lmwate*. The *Lmwate*'s impact on the communities has also been significant. Many parents are enthusiastic about their *Lmwate* activities. They say that they feel proud to contribute to the well-being of their children, and they are pleased that their traditional way of life is being recognised and promoted. Some parents even say that they can now care for and manage their own families better because of gaining a lot of knowledge from their work at the *Lmwate*. An unexpected outcome is that mothers say that they are now more confident because of their work in the meetings and committees; they are now unafraid to speak in public and air their views. The *Lmwate* have also attracted a wide range of visitors from other organisations coming to see the early childhood stimulation activities taking place.

In trying to recognise and keep alive the culture of the communities, we have produced four audio cassettes with traditional Samburu and Turkana stories, poems, lullabies and songs. We use these cassettes in awareness creation on ECD. We give them to grandfathers who play them on manual tape recorders when they are in their traditional resting places or when they gather to enjoy their own pastimes. As the cassette plays, many of the elderly men get drawn into the songs and poems as they remember their own childhoods, and they tell their children and grandchildren stories and poems. These cassettes are also played in the *Lmwate* to the children. Many get interested in the stories and poems, and ask their parents to tell them the stories. In this way, parents are encouraged by their children to tell them stories, songs and poems – and early childhood development activities are subtly enhanced. Another benefit is that awareness has been raised among men who have started participating in early childhood development activities.

Chapter three

Health interventions

The specific interventions under health that target the child directly or indirectly include:

1. Supporting medical care for the enrolled children and families;
2. Carrying out campaigns on safe and healthy home environments;
3. Supporting malaria control measures;
4. Supporting maternal/child health;
5. Supporting initiatives for prevention and control of common diseases;
6. Supporting the improvement of the nutritional status of children and other vulnerable groups;
7. Promoting personal hygiene;
8. Enhancing access to safe water.

Medical care

As part of our integrated approach, all El-barta's health interventions work for the benefit of the children. Children face a number of health challenges. During the dry season, the acute water shortage affects children in terms of personal hygiene and cleanliness of their bodies and clothes. This has led to infections, eye problems, scabies, diarrhoea, worms and acute respiratory infections among many children.

We reach the children through the communities and their structures. For example, the communities, through their focus group medical representatives, administer deworming tablets every three months to children under the age of 15 years through the *Lmwate* and schools, and in the villages. They identify those children with medical needs and take them to El-barta's dispensary in the health department for basic medication, advice and referrals. The dispensary operates from El-barta's office compound, and caters to the medical needs of enrolled children and families. Thus the communities have access to health facilities such as drugs, syringes and advice. Children under 15 receive an annual medical examination in which El-barta collaborates with the Ministry of Health. Many illnesses that could otherwise cause permanent impairment are identified at an early stage and the children are either treated or are referred for specialist treatment.

Persistent drought over the last years has been a big challenge in community mobilisation. As mentioned in the introduction, Baragoi area has no permanent water source, and people depend on shallow wells for water. During the dry period when water becomes very scarce, parents – and especially women – spend a lot of time and energy looking for and fetching water. This prevents many parents from participating fully in the *Lmwate* activities. Parents with livestock are away with the livestock in search

of pastures, and are also unable to participate in ECD activities together with their children. To try to tackle this, the health department has constructed six protected water wells at strategic locations where parents have quick access to safe drinking water. This has reduced the time they spend looking for water, and therefore allows them more time to be involved in the *Lmwate* activities.

Maternal-child health

In our work with child health, we look beyond the child in isolation and look to the entire family, with a particular focus on the mother. As foetal health is so important, we look at the child and mother before and after birth. We work on immunising mothers, training traditional birth attendants and stimulating good childcare practices. As in all El-barta

Photo: Women often have to walk long distances to fetch water for their families, sometimes waiting for hours for the livestock to finish drinking. Young children are either brought along, as is the case of this grandmother, or remain at home in the care of siblings. *Photo by Tanja van de Linde.*

programmes, we work with the communities through their focus groups. Each focus group selects a representative in charge of maternal-child health. These representatives mobilise the community and identify traditional birth attendants who are then trained in the areas of safe delivery and childcare practices. They in turn assist pregnant and delivering mothers. The focus group representatives identify expectant mothers and link them to El-barta's health department where they have access to immunisation facilities, health education and childcare practices. After birth the families take their children for immunisation against polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough and tuberculosis. The parents are also encouraged to monitor the growth of their children on a monthly basis. Many parents use traditional methods of growth monitoring such as placing the child against a tree or stick, and marking the child's height, or tying home made bead strings around the wrists, ankles and stomach of the child to check for physical growth.

Nutrition

The growth monitoring helps us identify children who are suffering from malnutrition. Children are so susceptible to malnutrition that even a slight deficiency in their diet will have an effect. Traditionally, the Samburu and the Turkana had their own diet for children, which included milk, ghee, animal fat, grilled meat and fruit sap. But with the current socio-economic changes, these foods are either no longer used or at times are simply unavailable. The focus group nutrition representatives encourage the communities to revitalise these traditional foods for children. Every month each focus group monitors the growth of the children aged up to five years under their

Photo: Growth monitoring is done regularly in the *Lmwate*. *Photo by Joanna Bouma.*

responsibility and advises parents accordingly. Children who are identified as malnourished are taken to the *Lmwate* where they are given supplementary feeding, consisting of unimix, micronutrients and Vitamin A tablets. We try to work with their parents on providing a balanced diet and on childrearing practices. El-barta emphasises the use of locally available resources, and encourages the communities to use the food resources around them to create a balanced diet for their children. Given the difference in available foodstuff between the rainy season and the dry season, part of this work concentrates on the foodstuffs that are available in drought, and on traditional methods of food preservation to carry families through drought periods. For the space of six months, we monitored this group of children as a cohort to see if the supplementary feeding intervention was effective. The result was a reduction in malnutrition from 28 percent in July 1999 to 12 percent in January 2000.

Children need to grow up in a healthy environment if they are to be healthy citizens in the future. Parents need to be healthy themselves in order to take proper care of their children. To give the children as high a chance of this as possible, we also work with the communities on common diseases. The focus groups select one person to be in charge of controlling common diseases. These representatives are trained by El-barta's health department on the prevention and treatment of common diseases such as acute respiratory tract infection, prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and oral rehydration therapy. We try to reach the entire community through video shows, workshops and awareness campaigns. The results have shown a reduction of the incidence of common diseases in the area.

Personal hygiene

Many common ailments in the area, such as scabies, diarrhoea, or dysentery, are related to personal hygiene. Protecting children from these conditions therefore requires that not only the family, but everyone that the children come into contact with are safe. Each focus group selects one member who is responsible for seeing that personal hygiene is high on the group's agenda. Most focus groups have constructed bathrooms in the *Lmwate* using locally available materials. The bathrooms are usually placed in the corner of the *Lmwate*, and are walled off by tree branches lashed together. This allows for privacy while being well ventilated. Some *Lmwate* have fixed days where the children are checked for cleanliness and are given a wash in these bathrooms. When necessary, the children's fingernails are cut, the boys' hair washed and trimmed, and the girls' hair plaited.

The focus group representatives are trained to work with the communities on hygiene, and they encourage the communities to hang leak tins at the pit latrines for washing hands. They discourage the sharing of personal effects such as combs, toothbrushes, razor blades, towels and clothing. These measures have had the

Positive cultural strengths

- The *Loipi* are places where children gather together to socialise, compete with one another, listen and talk to each other, and play. The *Loipi* helps their mental and physical development.

- In the *Loipi*, children interract not only with their immediate neighbours, but also with agemates from other villages. The *Loipi* brings the community together to discuss issues, share and to have a sense of belonging. They strengthen the cultural bond.

- Children are stimulated early to become responsible adults through the assignment of chores at a young age such as looking after young animals and learning what is important from their environment.

- To develop a good personality, the Samburu believe that young children should feel that both their kin and the people around them love them. They believe that young children quickly sense resentment, rejection and frustration. They therefore treat children with tenderness and love.

- Children are always in the proximity of adults and are often touched. This is believed to provide security, which is believed to be the foundation for a good personality.

- Children are groomed to be good adults through observing virtues such as honesty, respect, trust, obedience, courage. Children are praised by everyone around them.

- It is felt important that children share their feelings, and this can be done through songe, poems, and riddles.

- Through songs, poems, plays, and riddles children are stimulated and their language skills, life values, cultural norms and personalities are developed. Repetition of these stimulates memory development.

- Taboos and beliefs during the mothers' pregnancy ensures that a child receives the time and space necessary to develop well before another child is born.

- It is important that parents are involved in the development of their children as this encourages them to learn faster than when the parents are not involved.

- It is important that parents encourage and praise their children, and are always ready to correct them when necessary. By encouraging them to do the right things, and by identifying good role models, children become intelligent and brave.

Early Childhood Development amongst the Samburu people: building on their cultural strength, by Judith W. Shikanda, CCF, Kenya

effect of reducing infectious diseases such as scabies and worms. Medical records indicate that worm infestation has been reduced from 81 cases to 11 cases over the year 1999.

As mentioned earlier, part of the difficulty we face in encouraging improved personal and general hygiene is the scarcity of water. Water is life. The availability and quality of water is an important factor in child and family health. Women walk as far as eight kilometres to look for water, sometimes spending eight hours at the water hole waiting for livestock to finish drinking before they can take what they need. The most mothers can carry is about 20 litres, which only supplies an average family for half a day if no baths are taken. The six water wells that El-barta constructed and protected to serve the communities, which are managed and maintained by the communities' water committees, have been a great help in ensuring a supply of accessible safe drinking water. These wells now serve about 40 percent of the families in the communities that we work with. It has also reduced the time spent by mothers in collecting water, and has freed them to spend more time with their children.

Safe home environment

Hygiene also means providing as safe a home environment as is possible that is conducive to children's safe growth and development. For example, children should have safe play areas around their homes in terms of harmful objects and contamination that can cause diseases. The communities, through focus group representatives in charge of safe home environment, try to ensure this safety. They construct dish racks for sterilising dishes by drying them in the sun, digging rubbish pits to keep the area clean and free of potentially harmful objects, cleaning compounds, and using and encouraging everybody, including children, to use pit latrines. The focus group representatives are trained on maintaining safe home environments and they in turn mobilise and train the community.

The use of pit latrines has increased tremendously in recent times. The traditional beliefs that hindered the sharing of pit latrines with in-laws, men or women, or the *moran* (warrior initiated youth) are gradually fading. This has led to a rise in the number of pit latrines and in the number of communities building and using them. All the pit latrines are built of locally available materials. This has had a direct and positive impact on the health of children who are the most vulnerable to contracting infections, diseases and worms. We know that children learn best through the manipulation of materials. When children pick up an object they first observe it and then they put it into their mouths. They also walk and crawl on bare hands and feet. Any contamination therefore infects children faster than it would other persons. The home and surroundings should therefore be kept safe and clean. By keeping the compounds tidy and clear of dangerous objects or unhygienic items, children's general health has improved.

Chapter four

Food security interventions

Traditionally, the Samburu and Turkana peoples are nomadic pastoralists, keeping livestock mainly for subsistence. Over recent years though, the persistent drought and cattle rustling has reduced the number of livestock owned by many families to minimal numbers. This puts tremendous pressure on families, and it has rendered the communities highly vulnerable to food insecurity and famine. The lack of sufficient food is first apparent in children as they become malnourished and succumb to deficiency conditions such as kwashiorkor and marasmus.

In our harsh environment, food security is vital, as is adapting our traditional practices to a changing environment. Our ultimate aim is that the community becomes food secure so that all children will have enough food and a good variety of it all year round, and that malnutrition will be reduced. If less money is used to buy food, it can be used on other services such as medical care, water, and education. The time parents spend looking for food will be reduced so that they will have more time to participate in ECD activities with their children. In this chapter, we outline a number of activities that we are engaged in to reach this goal.

Drought preparedness

As Baragoi is an arid and semi-arid area, it experiences persistent droughts. In order to enable the communities to have enough food for the dry spell, certain measures must be put in place. The majority of the families fail to provide enough food for their children in times of drought, not always because they cannot afford it, but because they are unprepared. In the past, the Samburu and Turkana peoples had their own food preservation practices – such as drying or smoking meat, frying meat in or preserving it in fat, preserving cereals and even milk. These foods were used during dry seasons to supplement the diet when there was little food available from the environment, and livestock becomes less productive and children therefore do not get enough milk. However, these traditional practices have eroded with time. We now run workshops to sensitise the community to revitalise their old food preservation practices. With the advent of technology, the department also solicits and gathers information on early warning systems on droughts and other disasters, and disseminates it to the community.

Reducing malnutrition through food practices

We are now working with the communities on reducing dependence on livestock. One of the ways we are doing this is to encourage communities to cultivate drought tolerant crops which can stand the scarce water and high temperatures that are characteristic of arid and semi-arid lands. As this is a complete change in lifestyle, it has been a slow process as so few families have ever grown crops and most

are therefore still doubtful of its benefits. Fortunately, the few who have tried growing crops, have been successful and are encouraging examples to the rest. In 2000, we saw a large increase in the numbers of families cultivating crops. It is understandably those families with small livestock herds that are eager to try the crop farming as they are the ones who have the most to gain. The focus groups identify one person who receives training on crop

A PASTORAL FAMILY ENGAGING IN A FARMING ACTIVITY
WITH BOTH PARENTS TAKING AN ACTIVE PART IN DIGGING, PLANTING
& THE SUBSEQUENT TASKS TO ENSURE A HEALTHY CROP.
A PASTORAL FAMILY EATING A BALANCED DIET, A PRODUCT OF
THEIR OWN FARM & WHICH WOULD OTHEWISE BE UNAVAILABLE OR BOUGHT ELSEWHERE.

Photo: All the walls of El-barta's premises are covered in murals. The drawings here depict the benefits to the family's nutritional status of growing vegetables. *Photo by Joanna Bouma.*

production by El-barta's food security department, and they in turn train the focus group members on crop production and encourage them to put it into practice.

Initially, we assist potential farmers by providing them with seeds and farm tools, and taking them on exposure tours to farms to see what others are doing. We also talk to them about a balanced diet and about the nutritional value of vegetables. Seeing what others do has proved to be very useful. The result has been a large increase in the numbers of families who cultivate kitchen gardens, and a commensurate improvement in nutrition and health, especially of children. The crops grown include beans and green leafy vegetables. Many of these families are now able to store part of their harvest for the next season, and this has eased the pressure on families in their efforts to provide food for the family. The impact of a more diverse diet on the children is already visible. Their general health is better; there is less incidence of eye and skin problems; and, of course, a reduction in malnutrition.

Photo: Children playing with traditional toys made from materials found in the surroundings. *Photo by Tanja van de Linde.*

Apart from working on small crop farming, we also work on improving animal husbandry. Traditionally, the pastoral Samburu and Turkana communities' main diet comes from animal products such as milk, meat and animal oil. The animals kept are cattle, goats, sheep and camels. Improving skills in animal husbandry leads to stronger herds and increased yields of milk and meat, for example. We are gradually encouraging the communities to keep more camels and reduce the number of cattle, goats and sheep which are the animals that are traditionally kept. This is because camels need less water and food, are much hardier and are better suited to our environment. Their flat, large feet do not cause as much damage to the thin soils and scrub vegetation as do the cloven hooves of the other animals. They are therefore better for the maintenance of a viable environment. But another major reason is that camel milk is richer and contains more nutrients than cow's milk, and the meat is edible too.

Over the last years, many families in the community have been reduced to depending on hand outs as the persistent droughts have caused dramatic livestock depletion. This has led to much cattle rustling as those who lose their livestock to drought raid cattle in areas that have not been affected by drought in a bid to restock their herds. In order to address this situation, the community came up with a restocking intervention. Families who lost their livestock are lent livestock by the focus groups. These families take care of the animals until they reproduce. The livestock is then lent to another family in need which does the same. This ensures that all families in the focus group have a source of food of some kind. The role that El-barta has is to come in to work with these families on animal husbandry skills to ensure better productivity.

All the efforts mentioned in this section have resulted in tremendous improvement on the children's diet and health.

Income generating activities

While most families strive to be as self-sufficient as possible, in order for even the most self-sufficient families to be able to provide for the needs of their children, they still need an income. For this reason, we channel support through the focus groups in order to respond to the requests from the community to help with income generating activities. One person in each focus group is charged with the responsibility of training others on income generating activities. Typical income generating activities include running kiosks, retail shops or canteens; organising livestock sales; and selling charcoal. Once the families involved start earning an income, they are able to purchase food and other necessities. El-barta's food security department also helps families to identify viable income generating activities and trains them on basic entrepreneurial skills. This department also assists focus group representatives to develop and market proposals to solicit funds for small enterprises.

Chapter five

Beyond ECD

Education interventions

In order to reach the young children with any degree of success, we strongly believe that you have to reach the rest of the community. We therefore work to provide young people with opportunities for learning. We place special emphasis on young married women, who might only have attended school for a short period.

We run two activities: the Out of School Programme (OOSP), and the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme. OOSP targets pastoral young people who have gone to school but have left school because either they have passed the school going age, or they spend most of the day taking care of the family's livestock. To enable the young people to combine their family duties with learning, the OOSP programme runs afternoon and evening classes. Many of the young people who attend are young newly married girls, who attend classes after finishing their domestic chores. The Programme focuses on basic literacy skills.

We realised that the low literacy levels in the community impede both the implementation of early childhood activities and parental participation in them. Therefore the FAL Programme is aimed specifically at parents. The goal of this programme is similar to that of the OOSP programme: to ultimately involve parents in the learning of their children. Literacy skills enable the communities to fit into modern society and participate in various activities. Apart from their focus on literacy, the OOSP and FAL Programmes also deal with early childhood care practices and health education. Since these classes were established, many more parents participate in the early childhood development activities.

Children's games

Traditionally, the Samburu have had a lot of games for the children, which have been used in development exercises. One of the most exciting and complex games is the Samburu riddle. Riddles test the knowledge of children, and stimulate memory development. They are seen to help children realise their ability, work hard and become competitive. A child who answers the questions fast and correctly is seen to be bright and knowledgeable. When children are unable to answer riddles, they are encouraged to learn more from adults.

Songs and dances

Children learn songs by imitating adults. Samburu adults sing while working and during ceremonies, the songs explaining what is happening. These songs and accompanying dances have been incorporated into the daycare centres. Songs and dances are believed to help children develop by stimulating an appreciation of their culture; by developing muscle and coordination; by teaching language; by sharpening their observation and listening skills. Futhermore, they are believed to be a good way of socialising and cooperating with each other, and they develop a sense of belonging and confidence. On top of this, the children enjoy singing and dancing.

Early Childhood Development amongst the Samburu people: building on their cultural strength, by Judith W. Shikanda, CCF, Kenya

Chapter six

Challenges faced and the way forward

In the course of implementing our programmes in ECD, we have met – and are still meeting – a number of obstacles. High poverty levels among the communities is a major hindrance to effective community participation in the *Lmwate* activities. Many parents spend much of their time looking for food and ensuring their families' survival. Time spent in the *Lmwate* means that the family will go to sleep hungry that day. A family's income can barely sustain all its members for a whole day. Many children depend on the supplementary feeding given in the *Lmwate*; for many, the *Lmwate* is their only source of food. We have come across cases where the children who attend the *Lmwate* are given less food at home so that those who do not get anything elsewhere can eat. Supplementary feeding then becomes the main in-take of food rather than the supplement that it is designed to be.

Insecurity (cattle rustling) in the area has also been a great obstacle to development. It forces people to move frequently, making it difficult for a community to undertake any long term activities. Families construct makeshift houses

Photo: Christine Nakore (foreground), social worker at El-barta, meets in the daycare centre with the parents' committee of Bendera *Lmwate*. *Photo by Joanna Bouma.*

so that they can move easily, and while the interest is there on the part of the communities, it has proven extremely difficult to get them involved in community development activities that enhance early childhood development. In some areas, while the communities have begun development activities very well, they have been forced to abandon them due to insecurity. Parents fear taking their children to the *Lmwate* for they fear that something untoward can happen during the day. Everybody tries to be as close to his or her children as much as possible.

Having said that, the communities have realised the importance of the *Lmwate* and encourage their families and relatives living far from El-barta's project area to bring their children closer so that they can receive the services offered in the *Lmwate*. This has led to an influx of families and a resultant over stretching of the limited food resources in the *Lmwate*.

Another challenge that we have faced and still do face is the lack of capacity in terms of facilities and personnel. We feel that we have achieved very much so far from experience, commitment and initiative. But El-barta has no facilities such as videos, video cameras, or generators for electricity and so on to undertake many other activities that we would like to do. At the moment, being new to them, we feel that we lack sufficient knowledge and skills in early childhood development and community mobilisation around early childhood activities. In the eyes of the communities, the childrearing approaches that we advocate, though based on traditional practices, still appear new. Efforts are however, being made to address the situation. El-barta's staff are actively documenting their experiences and learning from them, and they are using many other resources to gain more knowledge in this area.

Up to now, the participation of men in early childhood development activities has been minimal. They seem to have very little interest in this, which they regard as the domain of women and children. However, their attitude has a great impact on the implementation of activities as the men are still the decision makers and can deny their wives the opportunity to participate in ECD activities. We have tried to address this situation, however, by launching early childhood development awareness campaigns among men and youth who are the parents of tomorrow. The tapes, mentioned earlier, of Turkana and Samburu songs, poems, lullabies, stories and dances among other things, have been developed and are being used in these campaigns. We have also held workshops for men. Gradually, we are seeing more participation and a greater interest on the part of men in ECD activities.

Way forward

Despite the challenges that we face in our work, we still want to further enhance early childhood development in the surroundings, and have identified some areas that we would like to move in.

1. Increase the area of coverage.
   With the influx of immigrants from outlying areas in search of ECD services, we have realised

that we should try to reach the families in their own locations so as to reduce the strain on existing services. To do this, we intend to reach the children and families through mobile centres and more *Lmwates*.

2. **Further develop the *Lmwates*.**
   We would like to concentrate on turning the *Lmwates* into dynamic centres which the entire community can use for training and other recreational activities.

3. **Improve the quality of preschools.**
   By improving the preschools in terms of early stimulation, we hope that the older children will both be better served, and will not feel the need to return to the *Lmwates* in order to have access to play materials.

4. **Document childcare practices.**
   So far, El-barta has participated in the development of four titles[2] in the Samburu language. There is now a need for Turkana language titles, and to document childcare practices.

5. **Extend *Lmwate* opening times.**
   By extending *Lmwate* operations from half a day to a full day, other children outside the age bracket will be given the chance to use the *Lmwate*. This will also give all the children more time to play and socialise with other children.

6. **Further strengthen community structures.**
   Thus far, working through established community structures such as the committees and focus groups has been successful. They have sustained community activities such as the *Lmwates*, maintaining water wells and so on, but they still need some capacity building and support.

7. **Enhance food security.**
   Poverty is a major problem in the community, and is exacerbated by persistent droughts, cattle rustling and low literacy levels. In order to reduce poverty, further food security measures need to be put in place which might include approaches such as micro enterprises or dry land farming.

8. **Develop training materials.**
   Although a lot has been achieved there is need to develop training manuals for the Functional Adult Literacy and the Out of School Programme teachers, caregivers and the community as a whole.

9. **Initiate peace initiatives.**
   Insecurity has been a major obstacle in the implementation of our work in the area. In order to reduce the number of incidents there is an urgent need to initiate peace talks among the warring groups.

10. **Further enhance community mobilisation.**
    In order to improve community participation there is need for further community mobilisation to increase early stimulation activities.

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2 A series of booklets on traditional stories for children in various Kenyan languages were developed by the National Centre for Early Childhood Education, Kenya Institute of Education. Among these were the four Samburu language booklets.

Chapter seven

Conclusion

So far much has been achieved in spite of the hard economic times, the insecurity, and the environmental constraints. Some notable examples of an impact are: a reduction in the malnutrition levels of children under five years old; an increase in access to safe drinking water; increased awareness levels of the value of early childhood development activities; the establishment of eight *Lmwates* with trained committees; the establishment of functional adult literacy centres; reduced cattle rustling; and the improved health status of the community. For the next few years, El-barta has also developed a three year strategic development plan that is aimed at achieving the set objectives and goals.

We have learned many lessons along the way. Two of these are that:

- the only way to work in a harsh environment is to run an integrated programme. This is also the only way to successfully reach children, who will benefit from all sides.

- we are working in a society in transition from traditional to modern ways of life. It becomes clearer by the day that it is imperative to keep as many good traditional practices as possible.

Photo: Protected water wells have been built in a number of locations in the area, giving families access to safe drinking water. The wells are managed and maintained by the women who form committees.
Photo by Joanna Bouma.

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About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally.

The Foundation aims to enhance opportunities for children 0-7 years, growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, with the objective of developing their potential to the greatest extent possible. The Foundation concentrates on children 0-7 years because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objectives through two interconnected strategies:

- a grantmaking programme in selected countries aimed at developing culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and
- the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

The Foundation currently supports a total of approximately 150 projects in 40 selected countries world wide, both developing and industrialised. Projects are implemented by project partner organisations that may be governmental or non-governmental. The lessons learned and the knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that are generated through these projects, are shared through a publications programme.
The Bernard van Leer Foundation was established in 1949. Its income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

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Working Papers in Early Childhood Development form a series of background documents drawn from field experience that presents relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

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